



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey
COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Worksession Minutes October 19, 2020 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to join the meeting via Zoom and comment by telephone and email.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Christopher Brittan-Powell, Jason Papanikolas, and Ethan Sweep. CM Brittan Powell joined at 7:20 p.m. Also present were Interim Town Manager (ITM) Laura Allen, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, Code Compliance Director Hollyce Goodwin, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper, Public Information Aide (PIA) Amy Hargadon and Prince George's County SPCA/ Humane Society President Tamela Terry.

1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey announced that October 20 is the last day to request an absentee ballot.

2. Approval of the Agenda

MPT KulpaEddy moved to approve the agenda. CM Sweep seconded. The motion passed 4 to 0.

3. Introduction

Amy Hargadon, Public Information Aide: On behalf of the Council, Mayor Dewey welcomed Ms. Hargadon as the new Public Information Aide. ITM Allen said Ms. Hargadon's references praised her ability to come up with creative solutions and work independently, which are important skills during this pandemic. Ms. Hargadon said she will be focused on producing the e-newsletter, adding content to the website and to the Town's social media accounts. She is looking forward to working with Berwyn Heights.

4. Discussion Items

Pit Bull legislation, draft resolution, possible ordinance change: Mayor Dewey explained the Prince George's County SPCA/Humane Society contacted her asking whether Berwyn Heights might consider legislation that assigns a low enforcement priority to the County's Pit bull ban. Mount Rainier has adopted a resolution that implements the policy, which could serve as a model. The SPCA has reached out to municipalities about limiting enforcement of the County's pit bull ban following an unsuccessful attempt to repeal it.

In the ensuing discussion Councilmembers expressed differing views.

MPT Kulpa -Eddy and CM Brittan Powell were opposed to ignoring the County's pit bull ban or assigning it a low enforcement priority. MPT Kulpa -Eddy said, as a veterinarian, she has seen the

injuries pit bulls can inflict and has had to euthanize some dogs because their owners no longer felt safe keeping them. Pit bulls were bred for a certain purpose and can be unpredictable. She would prefer to wait and see what happens in municipalities that have implemented the resolution. CM Brittan Powell thought pit bulls are a problem in Berwyn Heights. His children have been terrorized by a neighbor's pit bull and he has heard from others who are concerned.

Mayor Dewey and CM Sweep expressed support for the legislation. They said the data do not show that pit bulls are inherently more aggressive than certain other large dog breeds and that their temper is dependent on treatment by the owner. Second, pit bulls are not easily identified by their looks, which makes targeting them in legislation problematic. Third, the County is wasting time and money by rounding up pit bulls, holding them in shelters and then trying to ship them out of the County.

CM Papanikolas said the Town may want to focus on enforcing its existing Animal Ordinance and not worry about County regulations. If the County wants to enforce the pit bull ban in Berwyn Heights, the Town could not stop it.

Chief Antolik said he thinks that pit bulls are not a problem in Berwyn Heights. Most reports of dog attacks are from small and mixed breeds. He has personally rescued several pit bulls and finds them to be good pets. He believes BHPD should focus its resources on removing dogs that are dangerous.

Tamela Terry, President of the Prince George's SPCA/ Humane Society, provided additional background on the pit bull ban. She said her organization has been advocating for the repeal of the pit bull ban because it is outdated and ineffective. The 1996 ban was instituted because of mauling and a death, but maulings and deaths have occurred despite the ban. Data collected by the National Canine Resource Council show that most attacks come from dogs of any breed who are not altered, have irresponsible owners, and are kept not as pets but as guard dogs. Further, the data on pit bull attacks are unreliable because pit bulls cannot be conclusively identified by their appearance. She has personally witnessed the relabeling of dogs in shelters, either to label them as pit bulls or vice versa.

Ms. Terry stated that the County spends \$1.3 million a year on enforcing the pit bull ban, but pit bulls are everywhere. Her organization takes the threat of aggressive dogs and dog attacks very seriously and supports euthanizing dangerous dogs. Last year, the County adopted a law that focuses on removing dangerous dogs. The SPCA believes this is a better way to deal with the problem because it would deal with all dogs that are dangerous.

Mayor Dewey thanked Ms. Terry for joining the meeting. The Council will revisit this topic at a later time.

Project tracking update: Mayor Dewey said the Council receives regular updates on projects that implement Town Council priorities. The current project list comprises priorities of the previous Town Council, recommendations from the Quality of Life Commission, and staff recommendations. The list will be updated with this Council's priorities after the Town Manager hiring process has been completed.

Staff provided updates on projects they are working on and answered questions.

Clerk Harper said her projects have mostly been completed or require further instructions from the Town Council and Town Manager on whether to proceed, among them upgrading the Town's PEG station to high definition, codification of Town Charter and ordinances and website improvements.

ITM Allen reported for Public Works that the tree planting project will commence when Public Works has verified the types of trees requested and their location. Mayor Dewey added that progress was made on a bond bill to make improvements to the Town Center. An initiative to alleviate traffic congestion on 60th and 58th Avenue at Greenbelt Avenue has been paused and collaboration with the County on stormwater improvements is ongoing.

Chief Antolik reported that many BHPD projects have been completed while some have been paused due to the pandemic. These include outreach to the business community; developing a process to decommission police vehicles; reviewing and updating charter and ordinances related to policing; and production of outreach videos.

In response to questions, Chief Antolik said old police vehicles are regularly used as decoys to deter speeding on Edmonston Road and other Town streets. Speed cameras are stationary and can only be moved by the vendor, OptoTraffic. New speed monitors have not been purchased yet because the Town wants to wait for revenues to come in before making major purchases.

Treasurer Rodriguez reported that the pandemic has reordered her project priorities. Acquiring an asset management system and updating financial policies have been paused, while the administration of the CARES Act has been added to her responsibilities. Electronic check processing and remote payments have been implemented.

Code Director Hollyce Goodwin reported that she continues to work on streamlining the business licensing process in the context of the pandemic. She has regular discussions with ITM Allen about implementing virtual rental inspections and making adjustments to other code processes. The College Park feasibility study about instituting a municipal building permit program is expected to conclude in spring 2021. Code web pages have been updated with the latest permit applications and the Town's Business Relief Program. Production of professional outreach videos with BHPD has been postponed as has a review and update of code ordinances.

ITM Allen reported that the new Public Information Aide is producing her first e-newsletter and is publishing information on the Town's social media outlets. Regarding the Town Manager's projects, she has Yvonne following up on the bond bill for Town Center improvements. The welcome sign project has been paused and employee handbook changes are in progress. Manns Woodward Architects are reaching out to the Volunteer Fire Department about a joint public safety facility. She has talked with Park & Planning about picnic areas, the soccer field, and a dog park. She also wants to take a closer look at the joint use agreements with Park & Planning. Tree pruning and tree planting projects are underway.

Investment policy: Mayor Dewey said that the State Treasurer's Office requires municipalities to have an investment policy on file. The Council discovered that Town's current investment policy dates from 1995 and initiated an update to the policy.

ITM Allen explained the revision of the policy began under TM Broadbent but stopped with the COVID shutdown. ITM Allen resumed work on the policy in September and made additional changes to reflect best practices in public investment and to meet the requirements of the State Treasurer's Office. Per Council's suggestion, credit unions have been added as authorized agencies for investment. She has also contacted MML to ascertain whether other municipalities use citizen committees to assist Councils with investment decisions but has learned that this is not common practice. This policy does

not include step-by-step procedures for making investments, which would be developed by staff once the policy has been adopted based on information solicited from other municipalities and the Town's auditor.

In discussion, Councilmembers offered the following comments:

- The purpose of a citizen advisory committee might be described as an option for supplementing investment expertise if it is lacking on the Council and/or staff at a given point in time;
- The policy might clarify the roles of the Council, Town Manager and Treasurer; and
- The policy should require that a quarterly report be submitted to the Council.

ITM Allen responded that the role of the Council is to set the policy and ensure its parameters of safety, liquidity and yield are met. Staff is responsible for establishing procedures that comply with the policy and implement internal controls that protect investments from loss or misuse while assuring sufficient cash flow. The policy includes a reporting requirement in Section 14, which specifies its components.

Phone pal program: Mayor Dewey said she would like the Council's feedback on the idea of starting a phone pal program to address some of the loss of community that has resulted from the COVID restrictions. The program would randomly match interested residents who have signed up by submitting their name, telephone and a short introduction. Once matched up, participants would decide what to talk about and how often. This would be a safe way to meet new people and maintain community connections.

In discussion the following points were made:

- The signup form should be available in paper as well as electronic format to be usable by all.
- A review process might be needed to ensure that people are not matched with someone who may want to take advantage of them.
- Participants might like to choose themselves who they want to meet.
- The Seniors might be consulted on how they manage their phone program.
- The BHEAC's attempt to facilitate learning pods might inform the phone pal effort.
- Home phone numbers are controlled unclassified information (CUI) that is protected under Maryland law. Participants would need to agree to disclose their information ahead of time.
- Email might be an alternative way to match residents who may be uncomfortable calling up a stranger.

Mayor Dewey and MPT Kulpa-Eddy will explore how to move forward with the program.

MML conference debrief: Councilmembers shared highlights from the virtual conference of the Maryland Municipal League. MPT Kulpa-Eddy said she attended workshops on 'continuity of operations plans', and 'traffic calming and complete streets.' This reminded her to talk to NW/EP about reviewing the Town's emergency operations plan. She also learned that towns can rent speed bumps to try them out.

CM Papanikolas enjoyed a workshop on 'play and playgrounds,' which explored ways to enable creative playing in an inexpensive manner. CM Brittan Powell attended a budget workshop and a session on 'traffic calming and complete streets.' He thinks the information is relevant to the efforts of the Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force (WBBH) to make the Town more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

CM Sweep attended workshops on budgeting, ‘advancing race equity,’ ‘mitigating the housing crisis,’ and a ‘young municipal leaders’ event.’ He was able to pick up valuable information on how Towns can advance race equity and received an overview of the housing programs the County has on offer.

Mayor Dewey attended workshops on ‘engaging citizens through social media,’ ‘advancing race equity,’ and the ‘young municipal leaders’ event,’ which she co-chaired. She took notice that social media can be used as a tool to drive traffic to a municipal website, which serves as an information hub. The race equity workshop stressed the importance of integrating equity considerations into everything a Town does.

5. Department Reports

Mayor Dewey reported that a surprise ceremony was held for Chief Antolik to celebrate his 10th year as Berwyn Heights’ police chief. She thanked him for his service and for being a great community leader and regional leader. Mayor Dewey also reported on BHPD’s pet registration program, Governor Hogan’s most recent COVID order, how to vote in the upcoming Presidential Election and upcoming public hearings on M-NCPPC’s planned multi-generational centers.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported on the Education Advisory Committee’s ongoing work on an educational grant process for the Town, the upcoming PGCCPS budget process and a potential 10% cut in individual school budgets for FY 2022. She said the Green Team has achieved another Sustainable Maryland certification, and is working on a litter survey and Bee City USA certification. The Historical Committee has elected new officers and is reviewing its historic markers, while the NW/EP is gearing up for its first virtual meeting. The Recreation Council is hosting a Halloween home decorating contest and a costume contest but discourages trick-or-treating. Trick-or-treating has been labeled a high-risk activity by the CDC.

CM Papanikolas reported that Pepco’s contractors have started trimming trees on Edmonston Road. The Town has received detailed information about the project and the proposed tree removals, which are mostly comprised of smaller trees.

CM Brittan Powell said he has received many inquiries as to whether trick-or-treating will take place this year. He believes the Town might do more to get the word out about the activity being discouraged. Mayor Dewey said there is some confusion about the Town’s role in the event. Trick-or-treating is a holiday tradition, not a Town-hosted event which it can cancel. Advisories discouraging trick-or-treating have been published on the Town’s social media and will be included in the next e-newsletter. However, to stop people who are not residents from trick-or-treating, residents might be encouraged to turn their porch lights off.

CM Sweep asked when loose leaf collection starts. ITM Allen said it starts on November 2 and ends on December 28. Public Works has performed a test run of the leaf vacuum machine to make sure it is working. CM Sweep provided information on several hosted Halloween events in the area.

6. Town Council Schedule

The Council reviewed the schedule. The Town meeting date was corrected to indicate Tuesday, November 10. The Town’s legislative dinner was set for December 1, with alternate dates for November 30 and December 2. The December 21 worksession was cancelled and the January 18 worksession was moved to Tuesday, January 19.

7. Citizen Comments

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, commented by telephone. He said a new emergency operations plan was adopted under Mayor Jewitt, which was revised under TM Broadbent. This version should be made available to NW/EP if the Committee is asked to review it.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk